

Testimony of Ingrid Gillespie
Director of Prevention, Liberation Programs Inc
Member of MATCH Coalition
In Regards to
HB5364 AN ACT CONCERNING THE TOBACCO SETTLEMENT TRUST FUND

Dear Distinguished Chairpersons and Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Ingrid Gillespie and I am the Director of Prevention at Liberation Programs Inc, a large behavioral health organization in Fairfield County providing prevention, treatment and recovery services. I am also a member of MATCH (Mobilize Against Tobacco for Connecticut's Health), a coalition of over 50 members dedicated to help eliminate smoking and smoking related illness in Connecticut. I have had the opportunity to engage in tobacco prevention and smoking cessation efforts in a variety of capacities since 2005 including teaching youth and parents about the risks of smoking and vaping, facilitating a Smoking Cessation Supports Initiative for those living with serious mental illness and those with substance use disorders (SUDs) and previous advocacy efforts to fund the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to share comments on HB5364 An Act Concerning the Tobacco Settlement Trust Fund, in which we strongly urge that the committee dedicate at least \$12 million dollars annually starting this year.

In the 17 years during which I have been involved in substance use prevention efforts in CT, tobacco product use has continued to pose a serious health issue. Although rates of cigarette smoking in the overall population may have decreased marginally, the rate of e-cigarette use (vaping) among youth has increased dramatically. For example, in 2019, an estimated 27% of high school students had vaped within the past 30 days.¹ Short-term risks of vaping include those associated with nicotine addiction and exposure to various other chemicals within e-cigarettes. It is not yet clear what long-term consequences may be posed. Despite these risks, youth are exposed to advertising via various means including print, radio, and internet. Indeed, total e-cigarette advertising expenditures in the US increased from \$48 million in 2017 to \$110 million in 2018.² In my own experiences teaching youth about vaping, I have become increasingly concerned with their lack of knowledge about the risks they may be taking and their beliefs based on the advertising to which they have been exposed. Thus, there is a need for prevention

programs that include balancing education about the risks provided via appropriate media outlets, and in turn, a need for funding to develop and implement those programs.

There is also a continuing need for funding to support intervention efforts with respect to smoking, not only to reduce direct health-related effects but also to address associated issues such as SUDs. Indeed, smoking is associated with a higher risk of relapse among those with SUDs^{3,4} and smoking cessation has been found to be associated with lower rates of mood/anxiety and alcohol use disorder.⁵ In my own experience, I have been fortunate to have established relationships with people who have succeeded at quitting smoking and to witness their newfound sense of freedom. I have found that the odds of success are related directly to their readiness, which in turn requires engagement, education and support at both individual and community/organization levels. Thus, investments need to include those that enhance readiness at all levels. It stands to reason that funding to facilitate smoking cessation programs would in turn provide substantial direct and indirect benefits in terms of public health and public health spending

In summary, prevention and intervention (i.e. harm reduction and cessation) efforts need funding to address this public health issue. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to dedicate at least \$12 million annually of the \$473 million received each year from taxes and the Master Settlement Agreement to fund tobacco prevention and cessation efforts.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Ingrid Gillespie, MSc
Director of Prevention
Liberation Programs, Inc.
Member of MATCH

References

1. CDC, Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance System, 2019.
2. Ali FRM, et al. E-cigarette advertising expenditures in the USA, 2014-2018. *Tob Control*. 2020 Dec;29(e1):e124-e126
3. Weinberger AH, et al. Cigarette Smoking and Risk of Alcohol Use Relapse Among Adults in Recovery from Alcohol Use Disorders. *Alcohol Clin Exp Res*. 2015;39(10):1989-1996.
4. Weinberger AH, et al. Cigarette Smoking Is Associated With Increased Risk of Substance Use Disorder Relapse: A Nationally Representative, Prospective Longitudinal Investigation. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2017 Feb;78(2):e152-e160.

5. Cavazos-Rehg PA, et al. Smoking cessation is associated with lower rates of mood/anxiety and alcohol use disorders. *Psychol Med.* 2014;44(12):2523-2535.